

## Enhancing Our Horticulture

### STRONG STARTS: Urban Farming 101

Small-scale/urban farmers hold a unique and important role in Central Texas' community, economic, and food system development. In response to this developing community need, Extension in Travis County developed the STRONG STARTS: Urban Farming 101 series to teach new and aspiring small acreage farmers with an interest in sustainable methods. Attending the 3-part series were 35 participants from 20-69 years of age, representing 11 Central Texas counties. Participants managed an average of 26 acres, with most owning five acres or less.

Seminar topics included business and marketing strategies; appropriate vegetable and fruit varieties; techniques and strategies for urban farms; a site visit to a local urban farm, and resources available to small farmers including TDA, USDA-NRCS, and USDA-FSA.



Participants reported increased knowledge and intention to implement best management practices. 95% gained understanding of business planning and marketing strategies for small farming operations, and nearly 70% reported planning to utilize creative, community-centered income streams, such as holding farm camps, hosting special events, or adding a small Bed and Breakfast facility to their operations. Comments included:

- *"The series exceeded all my expectations. From some one completely new to all this, I found it to be simple enough to grasp and detailed enough to inspire me to follow up on my own."*
- *"Very good experience led by capable experts. Considering this was the first of its kind, very well done. This should be replicated in the counties surrounding all large metropolitan areas."*

### Soil Fertility Series Utilizes Education via Technology

A total of 32 Travis County residents attended a four-part seminar series of webinars that included information on addressing soil fertility and mineral nutrition. Each session covered a different set of essential plant nutrients, and information on leaching potential, the best method of application, proper application rates and timing, and symptoms of deficiency or toxicity.

The sessions were presented via computer link and were led by Dr. Sam Feagley, A&M AgriLife Extension State Soil Environmental Specialist in College Station.

### Demonstration Garden Field Day

Seeing information actually put to work is a valuable learning tool. As part of the 2012 Inside Austin Gardens tour, Travis County Master Gardener volunteers held an open house and field day, including educational presentations and hands-on demonstrations for youth and adults at the demonstration garden located at the Travis County Extension office.

Demonstrations for adults included composting; drip irrigation; and how to build a wicking bed. Activities for youth included the importance of eating a rainbow of colored vegetables, worm composting, and seed starting. Educational presentations included vegetable gardening, harvesting and preparing vegetables, and water conservation. 63 Master Gardeners worked over 850 hours throughout the year getting the demonstration garden ready for the event.



Over 250 people attended the field day, and indicated that they learned information that they could put to use in their own lives, and that they would attend similar events in the future.

### Extending Horticulture Outreach through Media

In urban areas it is challenging to catch people's attention, let alone offer enough educational programs to reach the entire community of one million plus people. Both traditional and social media outlets offer good answers to this challenge.

Travis County media efforts include: a weekly segment on the TV program Central Texas Gardener, reaching over 50,000 viewers per week in over 10 markets (TX, FL, AZ, CO, NC, KS; and You Tube); articles in the Austin American Statesman, with a readership of 118,000; regular appearances on local TV stations, with average viewership of 360,000; blog page for posting event announcements and timely horticultural information, with over 5,000 views per month; Twitter and Facebook pages established, with almost 1,000 followers and over 200,000 views.

### For more information, contact:

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# Making a Difference 2012

## Extension Education in Travis County

Travis County is located in the heart of Texas and is home to the State Capitol. We had the fifth-largest population growth of any county in the state of Texas. According to the 2011 Census, 1,063,130 people call Travis County home, an increase of 26.1 percent. Our growing, urban population includes a diverse demographic of 50% White; 34% Hispanic; 9% Black; 6% Asian; and 1% American Indian.

The Extension program in Travis County is part of the statewide Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Cooperative Extension Program at Prairie View A&M University. It is linked with Texas county governments and the national Cooperative Extension System. Extension values and promotes citizen and community involvement, scientifically-based education, lifelong learning and volunteerism. We are pleased to provide you with this 2012 annual report of our educational activities in Travis County.

## Improving Our Health

### Chronic Disease Prevention Program

In Travis County, 21% of adults are obese and at risk for a number of chronic diseases. 2,143 individuals participated in educational programs that focused on awareness, prevention and lifestyle changes.

Health and wellness survey results indicated that 82% increased their understanding of caloric intake/weight gain; 70% increased their knowledge of chronic disease issues associated with weight gain; and 90% plan to take actions or make changes based on information obtained during the programs. Comments included: *"Loved it!" "The most eye opening experience was the examples brought in for portions. I couldn't believe the size a portion of protein was, or a side dish. It was much smaller than I previously thought."*

## 2012 Educational Outreach

Educational Programs Presented: **6,619**  
Attendance at Educational Programs: **95,583**  
Individual Contacts: **200,784**  
Volunteers Involved: **1,720**

**58,899 Volunteer Hours**

**Valued at \$1,283,409\***

\*Hourly value of volunteer time, provided by Independent Sector

## Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program

EFNEP helps young families and youth with limited resources—those most at risk to suffer from hunger, food insecurity and the inability to connect with available support systems. EFNEP offers practical lessons in basic nutrition, food preparation, food budget management and food safety in settings convenient for the participants.

During 2012, EFNEP staff enrolled 1,245 limited resource adults in a six-part series. In a 24 hour food recall evaluation, 98% had a positive change in at least one food group; and 95% improved one or more nutrition practices to make healthier food choices.

7,211 children from 129 different groups enrolled in the EFNEP youth program. Evaluation results indicate that 94% improved physical activity behaviors; 87% improved food preparation and food safety practices; and 85% increased knowledge of nutrition.

Studies have shown that for every \$1 spent on EFNEP, \$10 were estimated to be saved in health care costs and \$2 saved in food costs by participants. **For Travis County, this is \$3.6 million in estimated health care cost savings and almost \$728,892 in food costs.**



Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

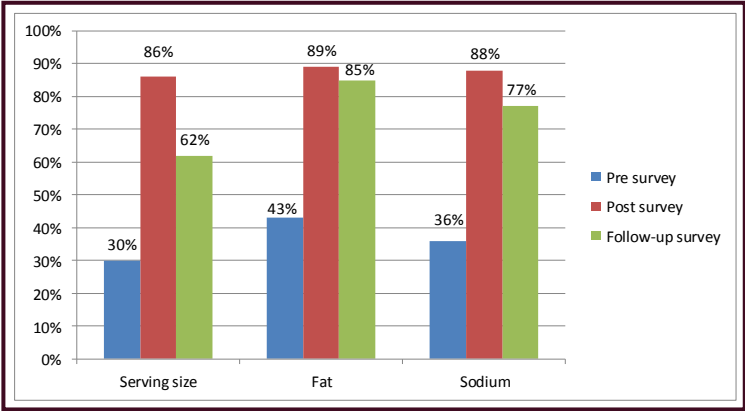
Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. Dr. Douglas Steele, Director, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.



### Better Living for Texans

#### Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

344 programs were conducted in 2012, with 10,887 SNAP eligible individuals and families participating. Using “hands-on” experiences, BLT participants completed a series of lessons on improving eating habits for breakfast, dinner and snacking; and utilized the Nutrition Facts Label as a tool when buying food. Survey results shown below indicate that participants improved portion size selection, and decreased fat and sodium consumption.



#### BLT Success Stories:

- “I control my weight by eating more fruits and vegetables, using low sodium foods and walking every day.”
- “I am making healthy choices by staying away from trans fats, and I have stopped drinking sodas.”
- “I buy foods with less fat, sodium and sugar, and I eat correct portion sizes.”

## Strengthening Our Families

#### Financial Literacy Education

The recent economic downturn and resulting recession have heightened consumer awareness of the need for financial literacy education. The Financial Literacy Coalition of Central Texas (FLCCT) was founded by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension - Travis County to be a leading, trusted, unbiased and credible source of personal financial education. 181 programs were conducted by trained volunteer instructors in 2012, with 1,395 clientele participating.

## Developing Our Youth

#### 4-H CAPITAL Builds Character

4-H CAPITAL strives to teach positive character development using the Connect with Character curriculum. All instructors teach the Six Pillars of Character: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship. In 2012, 3,799 Contacts were made and 313 Character Counts sessions were led for a total of 615 hours of instruction. Across the board, the program positively impacted the youth’s attitudes.

### 4-H CAPITAL Teaches Science, Engineering, and Technology Skills (SET)

4-H CAPITAL engages youth in hands-on engineering and design to teach low-income youth 21st Century skills that they need to be successful. Programs focused on engineering and technology to supplement learning during the school day by applying school day learning to real world experiences. This year student projects included: building a planetarium (height: 4ft, diameter: 6ft), programming robots to complete conservation-themed challenges, designing and launching their own rockets, creating solar energy robots, and much more. During the 2011-12 School year 2,215 youth participated in 4-H CAPITAL SET programs in Travis County.

- 62% of youth enrolled attended the program 30 days or more. A standard measure set by the State of Texas to measure the impact of a program on the lives of youth.
- 60% (217 youth) of a sample of 365 youth ages 3rd grade and up increased their science knowledge by 20% or more as seen in pre and post test results.

#### Youth Leadership Program Teaches Public Speaking Skills

The Youth Leadership program is a three day seminar designed for youth ages 12 to 18 years of age. The goal of this program is to help youth become more comfortable in developing and delivering speeches, speaking off the cuff, learning to implement hand gestures and voice inflection in their speaking and peer evaluation. This is a joint program effort between Toastmasters and Travis County 4-H.

There were 16 youth participants in the 2012 program. The youth were asked to write and evaluate three speeches and stand before their peers to deliver five impromptu speeches. A recognition ceremony, which included family and friends, was held the final night of the program. Youth delivered their speeches to a crowd of over 50 attendees. The third assignment involved the youth writing a motivational speech. One teen chose to write her speech on why others should participate in the Youth Leadership Program. Another participant said, “*It’s something I enjoyed! It really made a change in the way I speak in front of people. I made some new friends and it is three days I will never forget*”

#### Senior 4-H’ers Earn Scholarships

June 11, 2012 – Four youth from Travis County received scholarships through the Texas 4-H Foundation. A total of \$39,500 was earned between the four 4-H members. Hard work and dedication have paid off for the youth in receiving financial assistance to pursue their dreams of attending college. Additional scholarships valued at \$10,500 were awarded to four current and former 4-H’ers at the annual 4-H Achievement Banquet on August 17<sup>th</sup>.

### Science of Agriculture Expo

As today’s youth are further removed from farming communities and as urban sprawl takes its toll in Travis County, it is vital that we continue to educate today’s youth on the importance of agriculture and how it impacts one’s daily life. The Science of Agriculture Expo targeted 3rd and 4th grade students and teachers from Title I schools and provided the following educational components: curriculum packet; agricultural field day, and an evaluation.

416 urban youth attended the event. Evaluation results indicated: 100% agreed that Texas farmers and ranches work hard to provide a safe, affordable food supply; 100% said that good nutritious food helps them have a strong heart and mind; 95% agreed that agriculture touches their life every day; and 95% said their were going to tell their parents about the importance of agriculture.



## Supporting Our Agriculture

#### Backyard Poultry Seminar Series

Sixty-six urban/backyard farmers attended the seminar series to gain knowledge in the areas of egg production, egg sales, chicken coop set-up, and sale of both live birds and harvested chickens. Participants also learned ways to diagnose illness in their flock and how to treat basic medical problems/diseases. Most participants of the workshop were members of an online poultry “meet-up group” that is a new audience for the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County.



#### Pond Management for Landowners

Education about conservation of natural resources is an important part of Extension. Water is the biggest issue identified by clientele. Management of water on different types of property is a very important component to farming, ranching and to the small scale landowners. During a 3-hour Pond Management program, 25 participants learned the benefits of properly caring for a pond; including chemicals to apply and how to have the best success rate if one chooses to stock the pond with fish versus using it for stock or wildlife watering sources.

### Beef Cattle 101 Program

Fifty-six producers attended a Beef Cattle program that focused on the new cattle traceability rule. Beginning January 1, 2013, all sexually intact adult cattle in Texas must be officially identified at change of ownership as per Texas Animal Health Commission rules. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service has agreed to assist the TAHC in the tag distribution for this disease surveillance program.

## Protecting Our Environment

#### Community-wide Fire Ant Management

Two community wide fire ant management programs were carried out in 2012; one in Travis county and one in Williamson county. Both programs are monitored for fire ant activity pre and post baiting in both spring and fall, for a total of four checks per year. This program had 110 residents pick up bait for the backyard area in the spring and 95 residents pick up bait in the fall. Satisfaction surveys were provided in the fall and 87 were completed. The mean year participation is 5.61 years (out of 8 years). The mean education of pesticides after the program effort was 66.88%. The mean spent on fire ant control before and after community effort was \$32.52 and \$11.07 respectively, providing a mean savings of \$21.45.

#### AgriLife Addresses Crazy Ants

Tawny crazy ants were discovered in the Williamson county neighborhood where the fire ant program is carried out. Since these ants are known to displace other wildlife, it was decided that a program would be put into place to try to eradicate the ants and monitor the activity within the neighborhood. A total of 134 locations within the neighborhood were monitored for activity. Bait was applied to known infested areas in April, but there did not seem to be a decrease of population. When high levels are located, letters are sent via the owner’s association to the homeowner informing them that they have the ant on their property with instructs on how to manage the population. Ants from monitoring efforts are still being identified and counted for this project.



#### Pesticide Applicator Licensing

It is of paramount importance for those wishing to use pesticides know how to do so safely and effectively, with minimal effect on the environment. Pesticide applicator licensing is regulated by the Texas Department of Agriculture. AgriLife Extension partners extensively with the TDA in providing educational programs for individuals wishing to obtain their pesticide applicator license. In 2012, Extension offered the four-hour required training program six times, with a total of 87 participants.